Math Curse

In Math Curse, Jon Scieszka talks about how the nameless main character’s math teacher puts a math curse on her by explaining that you can think of everything as a math problem. The next day she starts to have problems. She starts to see everything as a math problem. When she wakes up, she estimates the time that it takes her to get dressed, eat breakfast and brush her teeth. She wonders if she will make it to the bus on time. When she takes out her the milk for her cereal she asks herself, “How many quarts in a gallon? How many pints in a quart? How many inches in a foot? How many feet in a yard? How many yards in a neighbourhood? How many inches in a pint? How many feet in my shoes?” This is when she figures out that her teacher had put a math curse on her.

Everything in her life begins to be a math problem for her. The whole day she can’t help but think about numbers every time she looks at something and many things she encounters that day happens to be math-related. When she gets on the bus, when she walks into her classroom, when she goes to lunch, when she goes to English, when she goes to Phys. Ed, Art, Math, everything she does is a math problem. Everything is going in a downwards spiral. Even when she is about to go home, her classmate brings in cupcakes. There are 24 kids in the class and the girl brought in 24 cupcakes. The problem is that she wants to give one to the teacher as well. Now they have to figure out what fraction each person is going to get. The math-cursed girl is the first to solve the problem. She raises her hand and says she is allergic to cupcakes. Everyone believes her and everyone except her get a cupcake and no one has figure out fractions. Finally when she gets out of school, she is a math zombie.

She is desperate to find something that will break the curse. She cannot take much more of it and is willing to try anything. But she can’t think of something that can break the math curse. She decides to try chocolate. Her favourite chocolate bar is usually 50 cents but to her luck, today, it is on sale for 50 percent off. That is too much math for her. She decides to buy liquorice instead. When she goes to pay she realizes that to pay you need money and anything that involves money involves math too. She notices that George Washington is on both the quarter and the one dollar bill, and Abraham Lincoln is on both the penny and the five dollar bill. She can’t help but try to figure out how many Lincolns you need in all cases to equal one Washington.

She has gone completely insane and is now a “raving math lunatic” She wonders what will happen if this keeps up for a year. How many minutes would that be? At dinner, her mother says that what her father says is false her father answers “What your mother says is true.” This paradox has her thinking, if what he mother said is true, then what her father said is false but if what her father said was false, then what her mother said is not true. And if what her mother said is not true, then what her father said is not false. But that cannot be true because he said that what her mother said is true, and she said it was false. She asks herself if that can be true. She thinks about it some more. Then she concludes that she had better go to bed. As she gets ready for bed, she uses math vocabulary for everything she does. “I undo 8 buttons plus 2 shoelaces. I subtract 2 shoes. I multiply times 2 socks and divide by three pillows to get to 5 sheep, remainder 1, which is all I need to count before I fall asleep.” That is when her problems really begin. She dreams she is trapped inside of a chalkboard room with no windows and no doors. On the chalkboard are a lifetime of math problems. All she has is one piece of chalk. How could she possibly get out? She is about to give up and die, when the answer comes to her. She breaks the chalk in half and puts the two halves together. Two halves make one whole. She puts the whole in the wall of the room and jumps out. She is finally free. She wakes up at 7:15am. It takes her 10 minutes to get dressed, 15 minutes to eat her breakfast, and one minute to brush her teeth. The bus leaves at 8:00am. She figures out with ease that she will be ready at 7:41am with no problem. She has finally broken the math curse. She is math problem free, and if one comes to her she can solve it effortlessly. Her life is just great until her science teacher, Mr. Newton says, “You know, you can think of almost everything as a science experiment.”